(Monroe Institute Blog – August 14, 2019)

AND AWAAAY WE GO!!!

by Helene Ramos, TMI program participant

Helene Ramos is a Consciousness Facilitator, Mind-Body Energy Coach, Hypnotherapist, Spiritual Advisor, and mentor with a practice in Charlottesville, Virginia. She is an experienced guide who helps people increase their awareness and make deeper connections with the possibilities that lie just at the edge of their identity in the things that most fascinate or disturb them. www.heleneramos.com

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"And Awaaay We Go!!!" That's what Jackie Gleason (a hugely popular comedian from the early days of television) used to say as he popped off to his next joyful adventure.

And that's how I felt a few weeks ago as I, and 23 other adventurers, gathered at The Monroe Institute (TMI) for a six-day intensive to explore states of consciousness, specifically out-ofbody experiences (OBEs). Discovering through experience is my favorite way to learn, and that's what I help people to do in my professional practice. But, I wanted to take some time to enjoy for myself, and this was the perfect opportunity.

If you are not familiar with TMI, Robert Monroe founded the institute in the 1970s as a place to investigate and expand states of consciousness. Perhaps because of his long career in broadcasting, Monroe became interested in using various sound frequencies to assist in achieving the out-of-body states he first experienced spontaneously. His seminal book is Journeys *Out of the Body* written in 1971.

He pioneered the use of binaural beats to create various frequencies that could assist to shift one's state of consciousness. The institute is located just 30 minutes south of Charlottesville. Right in my backyard!

Our instructor and fearless guide into the ethers was William "Bill" Buhlman, renowned OBE expert and author of four books. Over our six days together, he proved to be an intrepid and experienced facilitator. And, "intensive" is the perfect description of our time together. Bill introduced us to over 20 individual techniques to create the "perfect for us" environment in which to experience an exquisitely relaxed state, making it easier to detach from our physical bodies and induce the OBE.

An integral part of the relaxation experience involves spending most of your time in one of TMI's Controlled Holistic Environmental Chambers (CHEC) units. The CHEC unit is something like a berth in a Pullman car with a black, light-blocking, privacy curtain, a comfortable mattress encouraging relaxation, and cozy blankets creating a nest-like space. Most importantly, each unit has state-of-the-art headphones and dual speakers, which allow you to listen to instructor guidance along with the selected tones, which produce specific brain wave frequencies. Since we also sleep in these units, they become something of a second home.

So why devote time and resources to investigating OBEs? For me, it's curiosity and pushing the consensus reality envelope. These experiences have been part of human development since we've been on the planet. What I mean is that the ability of consciousness to "travel" without a physical vehicle or body is intrinsic to our innate state of awareness. Some speculate that early humans actually projected their awareness out of their bodies as they slept to keep an eye on potential predators roaming around their caves and also to track game.

But as we've become more and more focused in the consensus reality of our physical world, many of us have forgotten these natural skills. When OBEs happen spontaneously, the experiencer is usually so disturbed by what is happening that they quickly snap back into their physical body, ending the journey. For most, altered states of consciousness are not discussed or appreciated. In fact, the mainstream culture maybe view these experiences as indicative of mental fragility or personal weakness. So exploring altered states in an open and welcoming environment where these experiences are normalized is a unique pleasure.

Increasingly, interest in doing so has become widespread and enthusiastic. Participants in the workshop I attended represented a range of ages, professions, personal background, cultural contexts, and personal familiarity with OBEs from none to having regular occurrences. What we all had in common, though, was a thirst for traveling in, and curiosity about, consciousness.

As the days unfolded, the techniques Bill taught us and the way he framed them became more refined. We learned to relax and let things happen. Well, mostly. A real camaraderie developed

among all of us as explorers. Each of us had set aside a significant window of time in busy lives to go deeper into our own perceptions of the, perhaps, not so hidden worlds around us.

In the hopes that some of my experiences will resonate and spark something for you, I'd like to share my biggest insights, ranging from the practical to the more expansive.

Establishing Set and Timing. Bill recommends setting up a dedicated "place" for OBE exploration. This applies to anything that you're learning. Whether this space is a simple cushion, an opening in your day or an entire room decorated with inspiring objects, what you are doing is setting an intention. If intention drives the train of consciousness, by creating this space, you are announcing to a thought responsive Universe: this is important to me!

OBEs seem to exist on a spectrum of consciousness. Included here are observations connected to consensus reality, perceptual expansion into nighttime dreams, lucid dreams, astral projection, near-death experiences, merging of individual with group consciousness, telepathic communication with nature and the cosmos, touching into your higher self and transcendence into a feeling of oneness with all that is. Entry into this spectrum can occur through any of these doorways and is often termed a "peak experience."

Touching into altered states of consciousness can feel as much like "going in" as "going up or out." While there may be an initial tendency to travel “out" to dance among the stars, there is equal richness "inside" the self. What you might find is a universe of personal knowledge with multiple intersections with ancestors, past lives, human and non-human experience, world issues through history, and even larger evolutionary sweeps. Outside and inside form a multidimensional, enfolded, holographic experience. It's the essence of what quantum physicist David Bohm called "implicate" and "explicate" order.

Interestingly, Bill says he notices when he's out of body that most people who spontaneously experience OBEs—and he observes that all mammals do during sleep—don't venture far away. To maintain a sense of security, most stay in the etheric dimension—one vibrational state away and an almost exact duplicate of the physical world—doing prosaic tasks. When you're exploring, though, it's better to jump into all vehicles of, and openings into, consciousness that you perceive. Explore unexpected images, portals, sounds, etc. Being timid doesn’t work. Don't just wait around for something to happen.

And isn't that just like life? As an adventure in exploring consciousness, life asks that we be present and awake to the possibilities that show themselves. If I were the "world," I would say, "Bring it! Whatever your unique spark of experience, it is needed now to make me complete. Don't be timid. Don't wait around. Now is the time."

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